



STATE OF IOWA

CHESTER J. CULVER
GOVERNOR
PATTY JUDGE
LT. GOVERNOR

OFFICE OF DRUG CONTROL POLICY
GARY W. KENDALL, DIRECTOR

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Contact:
Dale Woolery 515-281-3788

Proposal Aims to Combat Resurgent Iowa Meth Labs

Following steady declines of about 50 percent each year since 2004, the number of meth labs reported in Iowa is leveling off. According to a preliminary report from the Department of Public Safety, 174 meth labs were found in Iowa last year, down two percent from 178 in 2007. One third of Iowa's 99 counties reported an increase in meth labs in 2008. When final reports are tabulated, last year's total could exceed the 2007 count.

"Meth labs remain a concern, and we must remain on guard," said Gary Kendall, Director of the Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy. "Due to their volatile and toxic potential for hurting innocent people and damaging the environment, even one meth lab is too many."

Iowa meth labs appear poised for at least a small rebound, as less meth seemingly is being smuggled into the State by drug traffickers. Nearly 40 pounds of meth were seized by state drug agents last year, most of which was imported from other states or countries.

"When it gets more difficult to produce methamphetamine locally, users and drug traffickers often rely on supplies from other source states or countries," said Kevin Frampton, Director of the Department of Public Safety's Division of Narcotics Enforcement. "When those supplies are interrupted, users and traffickers adapt and work harder to circumvent the law so that meth can again be produced locally. They tend to follow the path of least resistance."

A new National Drug Threat Assessment by the U.S. Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center predicts a modest increase in domestic meth production in 2009, due in part to a reduction in the flow of meth from Mexico.

"The resilience of meth users demonstrates the addictive power of this stimulant," said Kendall, who is proposing state legislation to create an electronic database to prevent the practice of "smurfing," in which individuals and criminal groups make numerous small-quantity purchases of pseudoephedrine—the key meth-making ingredient—from multiple Iowa pharmacies.

"An electronic Pseudoephedrine Verification Network would connect pharmacies, stop smurfing, and protect Iowans by reducing meth lab activity," said Kendall. "Iowa's 2005 law regulating pseudoephedrine has helped lower meth labs by 88 percent over the last four years, but action is needed to keep more meth cooks from beating the system and reviving a dangerous practice."

Under the proposal, all pharmacies would record pseudoephedrine sales in an electronic database and be notified automatically when a customer tries to exceed their legal purchase limit in Iowa. An advisory council, made up of pharmacists, would help develop the system. A similar proposal last year was approved unanimously by the Iowa House, but stalled in the Senate. A federal grant is being sought to pay for development and implementation of the system.

“Law enforcement officers still devote a great deal of time, energy and resources to developing evidence and identifying suspects in meth lab investigations,” said Frampton. “An electronic database would be a significant aid in reducing the local manufacturing of methamphetamine; and allow law enforcement to devote more attention to other issues, such as drug trafficking organizations and the developing trend involving diversion and abuse of prescription drugs.”

Kendell underscored the importance of other local meth reduction initiatives, including multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement task forces, anhydrous ammonia tank locks and inhibitors, and citizen awareness.

“Hand in hand with the need to reduce the supply of meth is the need to reduce Iowans’ demand for all drugs of abuse,” emphasized Kendell. “That requires sufficient treatment resources and effective prevention efforts to address underage drinking, youth marijuana use, prescription drug abuse and other forms of substance abuse.”

The Iowa Department of Public Health reports the number of Iowans seeking treatment primarily for meth use has decreased over the last four years, but meth still was the third most frequently abused drug in State Fiscal 2008, accounting for 7.5 percent of the total substance abuse treatment population. A recent federal report (2006 U.S. Treatment Episode Data Set) ranks Iowa as having the ninth highest rate of meth treatment admissions in the nation.